

Natural Communities of Louisiana



Coastal Prairie

Rarity Rank: S1/G2Q

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare		secure

Synonyms: Cajun Prairie, Great Southwest Prairie, Eastern Coastal Prairie, Gulf Cordgrass Prairie

Ecological Systems:

CES203.550 Texas-Louisiana Coastal Prairie

CES203.541 Texas-Louisiana Coastal Prairie Pondshore

CES203.542 West Gulf Coastal Plain Texas-Louisiana Coastal Prairie Slough



General Description:

- May be divided into two main types, upland dry to mesic prairies at the north portion of its range, and marsh fringing prairie on "islands" or "ridges" in the marsh at the south edge of its range
- The region is underlain by an impervious clay pan 6 to 18 inches below the surface that prevents downward percolation of water and inhibits upward movement of capillary water
- Soils are typically circum-neutral to alkaline, saturated in winter, and often very dry to droughty in late spring and fall
- Historically, trees were confined to the more elevated and better drained stream sides or ridges, forming "gallery forests", and acted to divide the coastal prairie into many subunits or "coves"
- The intrinsic soil conditions and frequent burning from lightening strikes prevented invasion by woody trees and shrubs and maintained the prairie vegetation
- Certain woody species may invade this habitat without periodic fire. The introduced species *Triadica sebifera* (= *Sapium sebiferum*; Chinese tallow tree) has become especially problematic, forming dense thickets or forests
- The natural demarcation line between the forest and grassland was (and is) very sharp
- Coastal Prairie vegetation is extremely diverse and dominated by grasses
- Many plants in Coastal Prairie also occur in the pine savannahs and flatwoods that occur immediately north of the coastal prairie region

Plant Community Associates

Common herbaceous species include:

Paspalum plicatulum (brownseed paspalum)

Schizachyrium scoparium (little bluestem)

Schizachyrium tenerum (slender bluestem)

Andropogon gerardii (big bluestem)

Spartina patens (wire grass, near marshes)

Panicum spp. (panic grasses)

Sporobolus spp. (dropseeds)

Carex spp. (caric sedges)

Rhynchospora spp. (beaked sedges)

Paspalum spp. (paspy grasses)

Aristida spp. (three-awn grasses)

Andropogon spp. (broomsedges)

Eragrostis spp. (love grasses)

Panicum virgatum (switch grass)

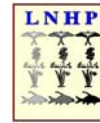
Sorghastrum nutans (Indian grass)

Tridens spp. (purple-top)

Cyperus spp. (umbrella sedges)

Scleria spp. (nut-rushes)

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Common forb (wildflower) species include:

Cacalia ovata (Indian plaitain)
Liatris spp. (blazing-stars)
Silphium spp. (rosin-weeds)
Baptisia spp. (indigos)
Rudbeckia spp. (brown-eyed susans)
Euthamia spp. (flat-topped goldenrods)
Ruellia humilis (wild petunia)
Coreopsis spp. (tickseeds)
Agalinis spp. (false foxgloves)
Sabatia spp. (rose-gentians)
Aletris spp. (colic-roots)

Helianthus mollis (sunflower)
Asclepias spp. (milkweeds)
Petalostemum spp. (prairie clovers)
Amsonia tabernaemontana (blue star)
Euphorbia spp. (spurges)
Hedyotis nigricans (bluets)
Ludwigia spp. (water primroses)
Solidago spp. (goldenrods)
Eupatorium spp. (thoroughworts)
Polygala spp. (milkworts)
Rhexia spp. (meadow beauties)

Federally-listed plant & animal species:

Grus americana (whooping crane)

Endangered; G1; SH

Range:

Remnant Louisiana coastal prairies, once covering an estimated 2.5 million acres, have been reduced to much less than 1 % of the original extent. Only a tiny portion of upland remnant prairies still exist, and they can be found primarily along railroad right-of-ways between railroad tracks and highways. Some of the larger prairie remnants are marsh fringing, wet prairies found in Vermilion and Cameron Parishes.

LA River Basins:

Vermilion-Teche, Mermentau, Calcasieu, Sabine



Threats:

- Fire suppression
- Invasive exotic species
- Agricultural, industrial and residential development
- Construction of roads, pipelines or utilities
- Saltwater intrusion and subsidence
- Overgrazing

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Prevent conversion of existing natural communities to other land uses
- Use of growing season prescribed fire (April-June) at a frequency of every 1 to 2 years
- Remove any invasive exotic plant species with use of spot herbicides or mechanical means
- Prohibit livestock grazing



Restored coastal prairie in Eunice, LA

Funding provided by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program

For more information, please visit our Web pages at

www.wlf.louisiana.gov/experience/naturalheritage or 225-765-2811

www.BTNEP.org or 1-800-259-0869